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Mutualistic Social Relationship between Tamil and Chinese Communities in the Formation of Social Space in Kampung Keling Medan

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Abstract

This study shows the unique relationship between the local Tamil community and Chinese newcomer community in Kampung Keling. The locality brought by Tamil community in their everyday life space and modernity brought by Chinese community in the commercial space blend together are reflected in the social space that appears in the public space along the pedestrian path in front of shop houses belonging to Chinese community. Both communities share the social space harmoniously for their respective interests. Social relationship in the area has an important role in maintaining the existence of Tamil community and the economic activities of Chinese community.

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1. Introduction

Kampung Keling, an old residential area in the city of Medan, drastically changed during the last century. The area that was known as the Tamil community settlement has been developed into the most elite commercial area that filled up by shophouses and mega projects such as malls, hotels and offices belonged to the Chinese community.

At first Kampung Keling was inhabited by the local Tamil community but over time their homes and lands were sold to the Chinese newcomer community that dominates the area by growing up their business activities.

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Nowadays, 85% of the total area of Kampung Keling has been occupied by Chinese community. And until 2010, based on data from the district office, Kampung Keling area is inhabited by 183 heads of Tamil families and 726 head of Chinese family (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Ethic Map of Kampung Keling.

The process of the selling lands and homes from Tamil community to Chinese community was not a coercion but due to propinquity and harmonious social relation between the two communities that have existed since a few generations ago.

Social relationship that still tightly raises new social space located along the pedestrian path where Tamil community are selling fireworks and carrying their everyday life space in the midst of Kampung Keling.

Social space that is created shows a unique social relation between the two communities in upholding solidarity and mutual respect. Social space is also able to explain the struggle of the Tamil community in maintaining their presence in Kampung Keling in the midst of social change that takes place in the city of Medan. For both communities, the social space is also a tool to achieve economic interests respectively.

2. The Tamil community as the local people in Kampung Keling

The arrival of the Tamil community from South India to Indonesia started in 1873 as a tobacco farm workers built by the Dutch colonial government in Tanah Deli, East Sumatera. The first time India (Tamil) labor came was around 25 people through Penang and Singapore.

At that time this community occupied an area around the Babura River, and then they built Shri Mariamman Temple in 1884, which is known as the oldest temple in the city of Medan, followed by Shri Subramaniam Temple in 1892 and Shri Kaliyamman Temple in 1905.

In 1917 the Dutch colonial government set this area as a settlement area for Tamil community based on a concept called '*quarter system*', the concept that divided the residential area based on ethnicity (Buiskol, 2004). Since then, this area had been so popular and synonymous with the placement of Tamil community which then was named Kampung Keling¹.

This settlement was originally a village with houses separated from one another. Every house had a spacious yard with shady trees and walkways made of soil. Tamil community farmed and raised oxen in the fields. Children were playing in the yard crossing the courtyard houses, whilst adults were interacting in the open space. Custom events and religious celebrations were performed together and kinship. This community run their everyday life with their habits in their own spaces.

But in the 1960s many of Tamil community with a more advanced life level who lived in the centre area of Kampung Keling sold their lands and moved to the outside area and continue living with the sales revenue from their high precious lands. And then the centre area of Kampung Keling was developed into a famous commercial area in the city of Medan tinged with rows of shop houses that dominate the whole area.

¹The appellation Kampung Keling is derived from the name of *Kalinga* Kingdom which is always referred to the origin of the people of South India. Kalinga was called as *Kalingen* by the Dutch and the local people call as *Keling*.

Currently the remaining Tamil community only occupies four periphery areas along Babura River in the west side of Kampung Keling which namely: Dayak Village, Mayor Village, Kubur Village and Madras Hulu Village (Figure 2).

Their houses are located behind the shop houses and adjoin to the river. There are many houses made of wood with very small road that can only be passed by a motorcycle. The houses mostly do not have terraces due to small available area for the family, so that the entrance doors are directly adjacent to the road. However, due to the low selling price of residential areas in four villages caused the Tamil community still survives even in the narrow and irregular settlement area.

In this periphery areas Tamil people are living in harmony, they still use the open space between their homes as a gathering place and a playground for children. Currently, many indigenous families are also living with Tamil community in those villages.

Due to the low income and education level, the remaining Tamil community is unable to compete with the other community for getting jobs in town. They were only able to offer services as parking attendants, drivers, housekeepers or a night watchmen. Their activities are just around the area of Kampung Keling. Tamil people are always trying to survive amid of hard life in city of Medan even with a relatively small income.

Tamil community in Kampung Keling presents and brings the locality in this area. Daily culture which characterized from the way of life, language, clothing, food and events and religious customs are still going on until now. The existence of the temple as a house of worship also becomes a social place for Tamil community.

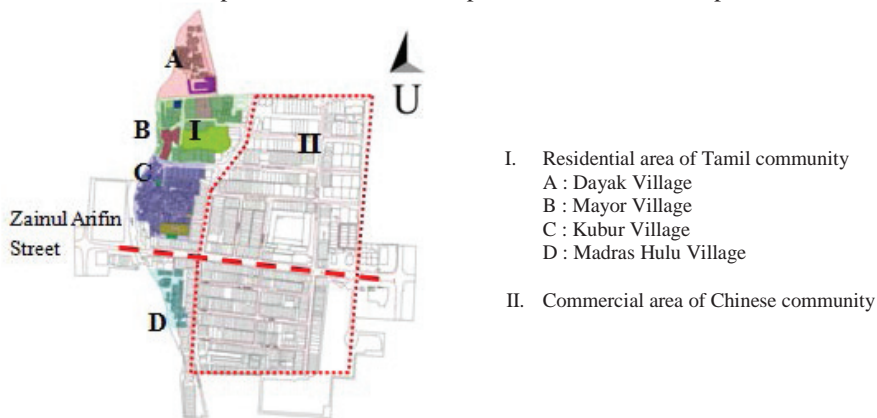


Fig. 2. Residential Area of Tamil Community.

3. The Chinese community as a newcomer in Kampung Keling

The establishment of Chinese community in Kampung Keling started since 1960s through the process of buying and selling land. They then began commercial activities such as clothing stores, salons, furniture stores and restaurants in the central area of Kampung Keling. Business activities that are carried on by Chinese community have developed Kampung Keling into the most elite commercial district in the city of Medan since 1970s. The growing business activity is clearly seen on the emergence of rows of shop houses belonged to Chinese community in this area.

Chinese business activities are always evolving and bringing new developments from the outside world into the area. The rapid development of business in Chinese community's hand brings modernity into Kampung Keling. The attention to lifestyle today also has made this area as a new consumption space (emergence of luxury restaurants, boutiques, art galleries, coffee bars) are very interesting and has improved the strategies '*aestheticise*' or focus on the visual consumption of public spaces (Zukin, 1998). With the changes performed, many shops belonged to Chinese community can still get customers even after standing for years.

In the early 2000s, the business activities of the Chinese community not only takes place in the shop houses but also in some mega building projects such as malls and hotels located at both end of the main street in Kampung Keling. The new entrepreneurs are still building construction of exclusively places to be a symbol of the regional economy.

With the building of shop houses along the streets and mega projects in the area, currently Zainul Arifin street, the main road that split Kampung Keling is becoming crowded and very busy street in the city of Medan. It represents the change of Kampung Keling (Figure 3).

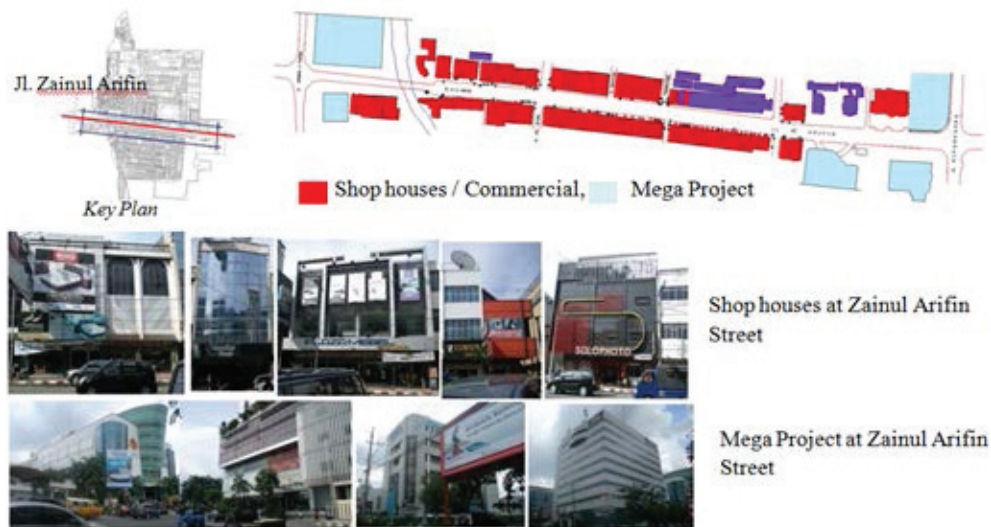


Fig. 3. Commercial Buildings at Zainul Arifin Street.

4. Tactic and strategy in social relationship between Tamil and Chinese communities

Tamil community as the local community still carries locality from the values of their everyday life, culture and customs in the midst of hardship and under economic pressure. They are struggling to support their families despite the helplessness to compete in seeking jobs with the urban community. Tamil community does the simple actions that do not require higher education, such as in the service sector which are offered to Chinese community. They work diligently, honestly and give priority to cleanliness so that the Chinese people are satisfied and delighted with their works. For the sake of survival, Tamil people are also trying to run a very simple business; selling fireworks along the pedestrian path in front of a shop houses belonging to the Chinese community. Space does not know them so that they do not comply with regulations in space (de Certeau, 1984). With very limited powers they use tactics

so that they can move freely.

On the other hand, as newcomer the Chinese community always brings modernity and new changes in the commercial spaces by prioritizing the exchange rate. The living standard of the Chinese people are high so they masters the economic turnover in Kampung Keling. They use the power strategically to grow their bussiness so that they can develop, produce and define the space for ongoing work (de Certeau, 1984). In the Chinese community's sake, the selling activities run by Tamil people in front of their shop houses becomes part of a long-term strategy that can support their business which uses large assets and plans. Chinese community feel safer with Tamil community run their selling activities in their eyes.

The different values brought by Tamil and Chinese communities, locality and modernity, show a contrast space in Kampung Keling but it can generate a social relation. Social relation among Tamil community and Chinese community in Kampung Keling is a uniqueness social relation in this area, and this relation becomes force in order to achieve their respective interests.

5. Social relationship between the Tamil and Chinese communities

The differences in economic and living condition levels between Tamil and Chinese communities do not become a barrier for both communities to live in harmony and peace. Even though the Chinese community owns the lands and buildings in Kampung Keling they remain aware that Kampung Keling is initially reserved for the Tamil community, so Chinese community respects Tamil community to this day.

Interdependent phenomenon that is mutual between the two communities where Tamil community needs a job from the Chinese community to earn income while the Chinese community needs the services from the Tamil community to secure their business activities becomes a binding social relation between them. This social relation has started since a few generations ago without distinction of religion, race and economic level. This mutual social relations between the two communities can be described as follows:

- **Feeling close**

Feeling close as immigrants since 1963 among both community members raises the tight social relation between them. Parents and children are friends, not only know each other but also keep the feeling.

- **Economic reason**

Although have a very different economic condition, Tamil community remains valuable for the Chinese community. Tamil people worked as drivers, night watchmen or housekeepers in a Chinese families while young Tamil children are often asked to help shopkeepers raised Chinese's goods. Although are not paid monthly as a night watchmen, Tamil men keep watching the shop houses belongs to Chinese community and the environment from outside interference.

- **Live in the same area**

Relation between two communities which runs daily raises a closeness, maintains the existing excellent familiarity, maintains mutual feelings for each other. Tamil and Chinese communities often gather together at night in pedestrian and drinking coffee.

- **Safety reaseon against others**

A fire that occurred in 1991 at Kubur Village destroyed almost all houses in the area., so they used the temple as a temporary shelter. Chinese people come to give them foods and beverages and also building materials. And also, in 1998, reformation conflict in Indonesia caused Chinese community become victims of violence in many places in Indonesia. But it did not happen to them in Kampung Keling. They survived with the help of Tamil community who kept the area safety.

- **Feeling as brotherhood**

Chinese people allows Tamil people using the pedestrian path in front of their shop houses to sale fireworks. The character of the Tamil community who are sensitive and irritable if one member disturbed is also a consideration for Chinese people for not doing arbitrarily to the Tamil people. On the other side, the Tamil people have a good habit such as diligent, honest and loyal which are needed by Chinese people. So that by the solidarity Tamil and Chinese people can share the public space along pedestrian paths peacefully. There are no regulations imposed by the owner of the shop houses which can incommode Tamil in doing their seles activities.

- **Religious**

The diversity of religions, ethnics, habits, and incomes status do not weaken the social relationship that occurs among residents in Kampung Keling. The spirit of brotherhood that had nurtured for so long and continuously toughen the bonds of brotherhood.

The existence of the Tamil people is supporting Chinese businesses and not regarded as a threat, this harmonious relationship is fostered on the based on solidarity. Differences of economic situation of both communities do not cause a social conflict. With respect to the strength of each other they can foster harmonious social relation.

- **Temple as a symbol of harmony**

The strength of social relations between Tamil and Chinese communities in Kampung Keling rooted within each community is familial and protecting each other. The introvert character of the Chinese community and always live in groups can be lost in this area as a result of social relation that exist between the two communities. It is often when Chinese people get in trouble they do not hesitate to ask for help from Tamil community. Evenly Chinese community in Kampung Keling usually use the Shri Mariamman temple as a place for praying.

6. Social space being a reflection of social relationship between Tamil community and Chinese community

Baker (2000) states that globalization leads to the loss of cultural diversity so that people do not know each other despite living in close proximity due to the influence of the outside world into a place. However it does not happen in Kampung Keling, the traditional culture of Tamil community is still maintained until now although Chinese community always brings in a modern technology and lifestyle.

Differences that occur between use-value in villages brought by Tamil community and exchange value brought by Chinese community in shop houses and mega project to Kampung Keling produced new space called '*differential*' (Lefebvre, 2004). The struggle against the contradictions occurred generates new spaces as meeting places of these differences. Differential space (social space) and its surrounding has the real potential to present in the meetings of the various values.

Public space along the pedestrian path in front of shop houses belonged to the Chinese community becomes the meeting place for the simple locality of Tamil community's life and modern globality of Chinese community's life in Kampung Keling, that then called a social space.

In this meeting place, Tamil community comes and brings their everyday life from the periphery area into the public space where they can offers their services and becomes the part of the city, they make the pedestrian path as the place to find sustenance, revive the values of everyday life. In the other hand, Chinese community exists with their row of shop houses in the middle of Kampung Keling.

Due to the mutual social relationship occurred between Tamil and Chinese communities, the contrast life of those communities blend together harmoniously in the social space which becomes a reflection of the social relationship that occurs between these communities (Figure 4).

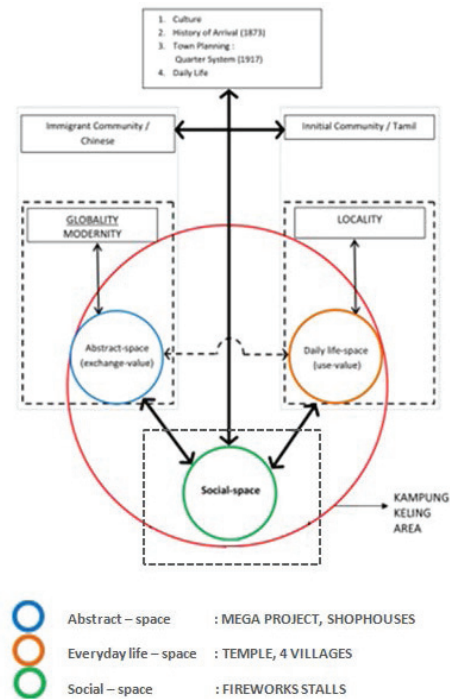


Fig. 4. Diagram of The Emergence of Social-Space in Kampung Keling

Social space formed along the pedestrian path can be seen from the row of non-permanent sales stalls where Tamil community selling fireworks. The stalls made of wood and plywood shape like stairs with a plastic roof (Figure 5). At night the stalls are illuminated by the lights acquired from the shop houses belongs to Chinese community (Figure 6).



Fig. 5. Placement of Fireworks Stalls (Partial) in Kampung Keling

Activity of selling fireworks in front of a shop houses has been conducted by the Tamil community since three generations ago. Selling fireworks at Zainul Arifin Street is a routine activity that are run three times a year, respectively during a month before the celebration of Eid Fitri, Chinese New Year and Christmas/ New Year (Figure 6). The stalls are opened 11am until midnight every day. They even brings their family for running this small bussiness activity. By selling fireworks three times a year, Tamil community earns money that can meet their needs for a year.

When they closed or the day is rain, the fireworks are only covered with plastics. After a month-long sell, the Tamil community carry the stalls back to their homes. When the ruling party running the cleaning operation along pedestrian path from the street sellers (fireworks), the owners of the shop houses help the sellers hiding goods in their shop.



Fig. 6. Fireworks Stalls Activity before The Celebration of Eid Fitri 2015

Until now, Kampung Keling is a famous firework sales centre in the city of Medan. At the grant, on the New Year's Eve, Zainul Arifin street with Shri Mariamman Temple as the centre place of Kampung Keing becomes the biggest place for firework festival, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion and social level in the city of Medan (Figure 7).



Fig.7. Zainul Arifin Street at New Year's Eve

Social space produced by social relationship between Tamil community and Chinese community in Kampung Keling also describes the struggle of Tamil community in maintaining their existence in Kampung Keling in the social changes occurred in the city This social space becomes a place for the remaining Tamil community to strengthen themselves and establish their identity in the periphery area.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicates that the social relationship occurred between the Tamil and Chinese communities in Kampung Keling is a unique phenomenon. Social relationship happened in the midst of differences of income conditions and values of life produced the social space in the area. This social space is seen by the presence of non-permanent stalls for selling firework in along the pedestrian area in front of shop houses belongs to Chinese community. It establishes Kampung Keling as an area that has a cultural identity and the way of life preserved by the Tamil community until today.

The study also explains that activities undertaken by local people has reinforced the unique identity of the city of Medan. Activity of selling fireworks performed by the Tamil community can maintain and even strengthen the presence and identity of Kampung Keling as a landmark of the city Medan

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